Sada-e-Jauhar

The Magazine of Subject Association, Deptt. of Islamic Studies

2025-2026

"Muslim Intellectuals in the Colonial Period"

Prof. Mazhar Asif
Vice Chancellor

Prof. Md Mahtab Alam Rizvi
Registrar

Prof. Iqtidar Mohd Khan
President

Dr. Khursheed Afaq
Advisor

Md. Shahnawaz
Editor-in-Chief

Zoya Haroon
Editor (English)

Abdul Aleem
Editor (Urdu)

Department Of Islamic Studies
Jamia Millia Islamia
New Delhi-110025

Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi and the Khilafat Movement

MohdHammad,B.A.6thsemester

Introduction

Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi, respectfully referred to as Aala Hazrat (the Great Master), is regarded as one of the most significant Islamic scholars in modern South Asia. He was born on 14 June 1856 in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, British India, and on his name later the Barelvi movement (also known as Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at) was established, which promotes traditional Sunni Islam with a particular emphasis on devotion to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Sufi traditions, and resistance to reformist trends such as Deobandism and Wahhabism.

Ahmed Raza Khan came from a scholarly family with Pathan (Barech) origins. His father, Maulana Naqi Ali Khan, and grandfather, Maulana Raza Ali Khan, were esteemed Hanafi scholars and Sufis. He showed exceptional intelligence from an early age. He finished reciting the Quran by the age of four and delivered his first fatwa at thirteen. He became a disciple of Shah Aale Rasool Marehrawi in 1877 and was granted khilafat (spiritual succession) in several Sufi orders, especially the Qadiri silsila, which he later headed as the Razvi branch.[1]

Ahmed Raza Khan, a prolific writer, authored more than 1,000 works in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu covering subjects such as fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), hadith, and aqeedah (creed), as well as poetry (na'at) in honour of the Prophet. His seminal work, Husam ul-Haramayn (1906), received support from scholars in Mecca and Medina, who criticized specific Deobandi and Ahl-i Hadith beliefs as deviations. He strongly supported practices such as milad celebrations, *tawassul* (seeking intercession through saints), and the Prophet's knowledge of the unseen (ilm-e-ghaib), which he considered essential to Sunni orthodoxy. Critics from competing schools charged him with extremism in Sufism, yet his followers regarded him as a *mujaddid*, or renewer, of the faith during the 14th Islamic century.[2]

Political activities and convictions of Ahmed Raza Khan

Ahmed Raza Khan's political convictionshavenever been of a nationalistic type, and those were rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Hence, he considered the state of British India as Dar al-Islam, which literally means "abode of peace" and also "abode of

---

[1] Bihari,A.R.(2014). *'HayateAlahazrat'*. Imam ahmed raza academy. Bareilly.

[2] Hasan,A.(2018) 'Who is Alahazrat'. Ridawi press.

Islam". He argued that due to the non-interference of the British government in religious practices, mosques, and personal law, there existed the essence of religious freedom for Muslims. This meant that it could not be labelled as Dar al-Harb (abode of war), which should enforce a state policy of hijra (migration), or jihad against British rule.

Such statements were very often being misused by the authorities seeking worldly gains, like approval of charging interest for loans and many such motives. Most of the political movements against colonial rule were promoted by Muslims with all the fervour and desire of the people.

But Ahmed Raza Khan advised the Muslims to work for their reformation internally, to seek their moral and educational upliftment. But this political neutrality was seen as a 'pro-British' attitude by his opponents. The records indicate that some Iranian scholars had advised Muslims against forming an alliance with the non-Muslim rulers, particularly the British. So, during World War I, a group of ulama (including the influence of Ahmed Raza Khan) had issued a fatwa declaring that the war against the Ottoman Empire was of a political nature and not religious. Therefore, there was no obligation of jihad against the British, and they were made unlawful. Ahmed Raza Khan, in his time, emphasized Sharia-compliant action over emotional pan-Islamism. Materialized after Khan's death, his followers were quite severe on Muslims who pledged allegiance to non-Muslims, especially in a political alliance if it compromised the Islamic faith. They were considered ‘dangerous’ to the faith.

The Khilafat Movement: Background and Context

The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) was a pan-Islamic and anti-colonial agitation in India that erupted to protect the Khilafat of the Ottoman Empire after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War and the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. The Khilafat committee was formed to pressure the British to maintain the Khilafat or the Sultan of Turkey. This was seen as a spiritual and temporal sovereignty over the Holy shrines of Allah and his Prophet by Allah's khalifa as believed by the Muslims of India. The Khilafat Movement was led by the Ali Brothers Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali, Maulana Abdul Bari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and many others. It successfully brought together Muslims and Hindus under Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement, 1920-1922. The Khilafat Movement was a social and political movement led by the Deobandi ulama (as well as some Barelvis who broke away from the mainstream Barelvi position). The Khalifa was seen as a personal religious obligation to protect the Khilafat, as also a political necessity to counter the colonial government. The movement was boycotting British goods, titles, courts, schools, and councils. The movement was led by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi had suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement following the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922. The abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924 also ended the movement.[3]

[3] khan,A.R.(1920). *‘DawamUlAishfil ayematul quresh’* . Urdu bazar, Lahore.

Stance of Ahmed Raza Khan regarding Khilafat Movement

Ahmed Raza Khan has not rejected the spirit of aid for his Turkish and Islamic symbols. He demonstrated sympathy for the plight of Ottoman Muslims and the wider ummah in fatwas and writings. But he condemned the means, leadership and religious legitimacy of the movement as it later developed in India.

His key objections included:

1. The Fiqhi Issues with the claim for Caliphate: He was a firm believer of the condition of Qurashiyat, as in descent from the Quraysh tribe of the Prophet must be part and parcel, which is supposedly a view held by classical Ahl-e Sunnat scholars. In that sense, he explained the Sharia's definition of Caliphate, which Ottoman Sultans fulfilled as rulers, but didn't fulfill this, according to him. Others, like Maulana Abdul Bari and Abul Kalam Azad, he said, belittled this necessity. A lot of detail was given by Ahmed Raza Khan, proving the necessity of the Quraysh lineage using hadith and fiqh texts.

2. Ahl-i Harb: He criticized the close alliance of the Ahl al-Harb with Hindus and Gandhi (also Hindu). Alliances with non-Muslims for political purposes risked diluting Islamic identity or being exploited. He worried that "Hindu nationalists" would exploit the movement to their own benefit while Muslims bore the religious and communal risks. When the movement took on Non-cooperation elements, such as boycotts, this appeared to him to be straying from purely religious reform into dangerous political militancy[4].

3. Practical and Sharia Concerns: Ahmed Raza Khan thought the agitation could lead to unnecessary hardships for Indian Muslims with no viable end with respect to tangible results as per the demands of Sharia. He rejected proposals for mass hijra and aspects of civil disobedience that could result in chaos or fitna (discord). Instead, he promoted quietist concentration on faith preservation. According to some accounts, he organised or supported conferences of anti-non-cooperation ulama at Bareilly.

Barelvi sources make clear that he was not "against" helping the Khilafat as such in principle, but objected to the "modus operandi" — the specific tactics adopted, mixed and dubious leadership, and deviations from strict Sharia guidelines. He has issued fatwas cautioning followers against participation involving un-Islamic elements. This position created a brief rift within Barelvi ranks, as some scholars took part in the movement regardless.

He was called pro-British by Deobandi or nationalist critics for this stance, with

---

[4] Khan,A.R.(1998). '*Fatawarazawiya vol 14'* . Raza foundation jamia nizamiya. Lahore

alleged fatwas during WW I or a general non-confrontational approach used as evidence.[5]

Defenders insist that his views were derived from principled fiqh, rather than a commitment to the Raj, and that he was staunchly committed to long-term security for religion over short-term advantage in politics. He rejected pure jihad or hijra movements with the same measure when the conditions under Sharia were not met.

Conclusion

This section lacks corroboration with Usha Sanyal's[6] argument that lay claim to the Barelwi school ulama's opposition to the Khilafat movement. In fact (if we go deeper down in history), general Barelwi ulama were much more supportive of the Khilafat movement, while Ahmed Raza Khan (1856-1921) had issues with methodology, the organized methods by which Muslim leadership organized this movement. Barelwi ulama show symbolic (especially, through issuing fatwa on khilafat / non-cooperation movement or even the ideas of Gandhi and Deoband idea of composite nationalism) as they were opposed to the unity between these two religious; Hindu - Muslim. But regarding the Khilafat movement, Barelwi School ulama, known as Barelwis, deliberately supported the Turkish Caliphate, and they even raised funds and motivated their men to work three times a week to spare some part of their wages for the Turkish caliph.

[5] Khan,D. (2020) '*SaltanateUsmaniyaKe Tagafoz main Molana Ahmed Raza Khan Ka Kirdar* ' idara tehkeekate imam ahmed raza. samundri.

[6] Sanyal,U. (2005) *'AhmedrazaKhaninthe path of prophet'* . Oneworld publications. Oxford.